

SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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Outline Of Reference Paper On:

THE UPWARD CURVE OF SOVIET HOOLIGANISM

Youthful hooliganism, showing a surprising growth rate in all strata of Soviet society, causes the authorities considerable concern. Hardly a day passes without a delinquency report in the Soviet youth organ Komsomolskaya Pravda. Some towns appear to have been taken over by gangs of young hoodlums.

An analysis of the Soviet press indicates that there are two types of youths afflicted by what the Soviet writers concede is a "social disease": 1) the confirmed criminal, and 2) the "part-time hooligan."

The Soviet attempt to eradicate this disease, - hooliganism - by organizing "vigilante" forces called "People's Guards" to assist the "Militsiya" (local police) appears to have failed. The reputation and the stature of these "volunteer brigades" are something less than minuscule, even among the regular law-enforcement forces.

An aspect of Soviet hooliganism on the rise which is of particular concern to the authorities is the undercurrent of anti-government feeling that from time to time manifests itself in the assaults on --even murders of-- Party officials.

The current situation contains many elements of a civil war, and is reminiscent of the crime wave which engulfed the Soviet Union immediately following the 1917 revolution. It must be a sobering thought for the Soviet leaders that today, after four decades of proclaiming that crime is a product of capitalism and is destined to disappear under Communism, youthful hooliganism should again be a major problem.

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THE UPWARD CURVE OF SOVIET HOOLIGANISM

Youthful hooliganism has increased sharply in the USSR in recent years, penetrating all social levels. Hoodlums can be found among unskilled young laborers, the so-called "gilded youth" of the privileged classes, and even among students.

Judging from the Soviet press, the extent of rowdyism and the forms which it is taking are without recent precedent and cause the authorities considerable alarm. During the past few months, Soviet newspapers have contained numerous articles on the situation. Komsomolskaya Pravda, the organ of the Komsomol, or Young Communist League, reports fresh cases of hooliganism nearly every day.

In many Soviet towns bands of young hoodlums wage gang warfare over turfs, or their Soviet equivalent. In Pskov, for instance, "every evening there are brawls and knifings. Rival gangs of hooligans set upon one another. . . , and members of the militia do not even dare to walk about alone" (Komsomolskaya Pravda, September 20, 1961). Saratov, "the town that cannot sleep," as Komsomolskaya Pravda describes it, is terrorized by a gang of hooligans. Recently they attempted to murder a lieutenant of the militia. Commented the correspondent of the youth organ: "The distant offspring of the zhigans (thugs) and new kinds of criminals are still wandering about our Soviet land. It is hard to root out this accursed thieving tribe" (August 25, 1961). Even Moscow is embattled against assaults on the public by hooligans: a barrier put up at the Yaroslavl railroad station, bears the warning sign "You shall not pass." Caricatures attached to the barrier depict the various types of hooligans in Moscow who molest citizens, and the warning reads further: "We have no place for debauchees or hooligans in our society, but if there still are rowdies about, we must punish them" (Komsomolskaya Pravda, September 19, 1961). That they will be punished was emphasized also by the chairman of the USSR Supreme Court, A. Gorkin, in an article he wrote for Izvestia. Gorkin justified the recent introduction of the death penalty for various crimes, including "persistent hooliganism" (September 16, 1961).

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A study of the Soviet press indicates that young Soviet hooligans may be divided roughly into two distinct types: 1) those who belong to the criminal class and are virtual social outcasts, and 2) the vast majority of "part-time hooligans"—on the surface virtuous members of the working youth, imbued with "socialist morality" and political consciousness. There has lately been a marked increase in the number of offenses committed by members of the Soviet Young Communist League and Party elite, as well as by a number of People's Guards, "voluntary" units formed to aid the militia in combating crime.

The current wave of hooliganism has become such a headache to the Soviet authorities that it is being described in the Soviet press as a "social disease" and being likened to an epidemic caused by what one paper terms "hooliganococci":

"There exists a certain category of unstable persons, potentially ready to commit acts of hooliganism. They are infected with the bacilli of hooliganism. From time to time these hooliganococci slowly penetrate into the bloodstream and eat away the soul. The disease advances and - watch - in the end those who have been exposed reveal its repulsive symptoms" (Komsomolskaya Pravda, July 16, 1961).

It was in an attempt to cure this "disease" that the Soviet government decided as far back as in March, 1959, to enlist the help of Soviet workers and Komsomol members. On March 10 Pravda published a decree ordering the immediate formation of the People's Guards, or "voluntary" brigades, to maintain public order at "factories, construction sites, transport centers, state and collective farms and educational establishments."

It is evident, however, that this drive for public cooperation in the fight against crime has largely failed. The vast propaganda campaign undertaken by the Soviet authorities to whip up popular enthusiasm for the anti-crime crusade has met with general apathy and even outright hostility. A large proportion of the "voluntary brigades" supposedly formed are actually paper brigades. Those which were organized, were apparently held down by half-hearted support--sometimes only a handful of workers in a factory could be mustered to serve as unpaid amateur militiamen. Dereliction of duty is common:

Regrettably one can observe the lads with the red armbands (insignia of the People's Guards) calmly wandering about the streets in the center of Zagorsk while there is not a sign of them in the less well-lit parts. Here the drunken hooligans hold sway (Nedelya, Week, No. 36, September 1961).

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The People's Guards are shirking their duty also in Karaganda: In the evening there are many drunks at the bus stops and other crowded places, but they are not taken in tow by the guards. The work of the brigade headquarters is badly organized. The brigade members confine their activities to patrolling the streets. But go inside the dance halls, into the parks and the Palace of Sport. Here brawls break out. You may be insulted, punched, and you will hunt high and low for the brigade members... the result is that there are plenty of patrols in town, but hooligans give the inhabitants no peace (Komsomolskaya Pravda, July 1, 1961).

In Tula the "brigades in town do not scare the hooligans..." "A group of hooligans used foul language, accosted passersby, monopolizing most of the sidewalk. A Komsomol patrol went by, but the brigade members with the red armbands gave the hooligans a wide berth," (Krokodil, No. 21, 1961). The brigades "are often threatened with contempt" by the public (Komsomolskaya Pravda, September 20, 1961); in Karaganda they "are not given support, and their hard and occasionally dangerous job is regarded with scorn" (ibid., July 1, 1961). Often bystanders come to the defense of young hooligans against the brigades (ibid., July 6, 1961). Furthermore, according to the Soviet press, the regular militia at times displays resentment of the brigades, with the result that often offenders brought before the militia by the brigades are released later, and the delinquency reports taken off the blotter (ibid., August 15, 1961).

The Soviet press reports that customarily bail is put up for all offenders. A practice that has shown a steady increase is the furnishing of "group bail." Often meetings of university students, factory and agricultural workers, and members of other occupations summoned to deal with one of their number accused of hooliganism, apparently make no attempt to mete out punishment; Izvestia (September 19, 1961) reports the case of "the wolf on bail"--a confirmed hooligan for whom the Party and trade union organizations furnished bail after he had been found guilty for the sixth time of the same offense.

An aspect of hooliganism on the rise which causes particular concern to the Party authorities is its distinctly political anti-government undertone, seen in the increasing rate of violent assaults and even murders of militiamen & local Party & Komsomol officials. It appears that young hooligans of respectable background - not hardened criminals - are usually responsible for such attacks, and recently the press has contained numerous reports of such cases. Victims so far have included a district Komsomol secretary and the director of a state farm. Izvestia reported on August 17, 1961, that one hooligan had assaulted the chairman of a local Party committee, inflicted bodily injuries on a Party bureau secretary and murdered a Party activist. Militia headquarters are sometimes openly attacked, and during drinking parties

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in clubs and recreation rooms, young carousers, it is said, invariably proceed to tear down all Party slogans and posters from walls (Yunost, Youth, No. 8, 1961). Such violence against Party officialdom is undoubtedly a form of retaliation against the ruthless legal measures now being taken against hooligans. In many respects the present situation resembles a war between Soviet hooligan youth and the authority of the regime. It is reminiscent of the crime wave which broke out in the period of chaos immediately after the revolution. Then as now, more than forty years later, suppression of hooliganism was treated by the Soviet government as a matter of political urgency, and hooligans were equated with "counter-revolutionaries" and "exploiters."

It must be a sobering thought for the Soviet leaders that today, after four decades of inculcation of "socialist morality" and political consciousness, youthful hooliganism has again become a major problem and is worsening rather than improving at the very time when Soviet society is supposed to be entering the Communist millenium.

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